

H.B. 144 would legalize the unsporting of hounding bears, an unnecessary practice banned here since 1921.



A pack of hounds pursue a tree'd bear.

WHAT IS BEAR HOUNDING?

Hounding involves fitting dogs with high-tech radio or GPS collars that allow houndsmen to monitor the dogs' movement remotely. Hound hunters release packs of dogs to chase bears often for miles, across all types of habitat, including private and protected property. Bears are poor distance runners and dogs pursue their target until in exhaustion the bear climbs a tree to escape or turns to confront the dog pack.

BEAR HOUNDING VIOLATES MONTANA'S TRADITIONS

Hunters often profess adherence to rules of fair chase, which require that animals have a reasonable chance to escape. There is nothing fair about a pack of trained hounds wearing high-tech collars running down a bear or shooting an exhausted bear off a tree limb. Montana's own 2011 black bear report acknowledges that bear hounding is a violation of Montana's fair chase traditions. It reads: "**Montana offers world renowned, fair-chase**

black bear hunting, and black bears are a highly treasured big game animal in Montana....**Use of dogs to hunt black bears or grizzly bears was prohibited in Montana in 1921**....The harvesting of cubs or females with cubs, was prohibited in 1947, followed by a prohibition of the use of baits in 1948. **With these regulations in place, black bear hunting became more of a fair chase sport in Montana.**"¹

THE PRESENCE OF GRIZZLIES IN MONTANA PRESENTS UNIQUE CONCERNS

While many states that don't have grizzly populations have chosen to ban hounding also, the prohibition on bear hounding in a state with a grizzly population is particularly important. Grizzlies don't tree as readily as black bears, and dogs are not selective in which bear species they target. Allowing bear hounding would put dogs and threatened grizzlies at risk of injury or death. In fact, the President of a California hound hunting organization recently wrote in a floor alert to the California legislature, "**One of the main reasons states like Montana and Wyoming don't allow the use of dogs is because of their grizzly bear population, as they don't tree.**"³

HOUNDING IS COMPLETELY UNECESSARY

According to the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks 2011 bear report: "Since the mid-1990s, Montana's annual black bear harvest has averaged 4th in the nation behind Washington, Oregon, and Idaho in numbers of bears harvested.... Approximately 1,000 black bears are harvested annually in Montana . . . **This is accomplished without the use of baits or hounds.**"² Only eighteen states allow the hunting of bears with hounds, and fourteen states, including Colorado, Oregon, Washington, New York and Pennsylvania, conduct successful hunting seasons without resorting to this unfair and inhumane practice. Montana has banned hounding for nearly a century, and there is no need to allow the practice again.

HOUNDS OFTEN TRESPASS ON PRIVATE AND PROTECTED PROPERTY

Since the pursuit of bears by hounds depends on releasing them to run across large tracts of land, hounds also pursue non-target species, including deer and ground-nesting birds, and animals who are endangered or protected. Off-leash and off-trail hounds are unpredictable and cause stress and flushing behavior in many wildlife species including deer, birds, and small mammals. The nature of hounding also causes significant conflicts between hound hunters and landowners, ranchers, other types of hunters, and other outdoor recreationists.

¹ Mace, Richard D. and Tonya Chilton-Radant. "Black Bear Harvest Research and Management in Montana 2011 Final Report." Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. 2011. p. vii, p. 5. Bold type added.

² Ibid, p.1, p. 45.

³—"Floor alert re: opposition to SB 1221" Josh Brones, 2012.

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Testimony in opposition to HB 144: (406-698-1167 c, wildquests@aol.com)

I am testifying today in opposition to House Bill 144 which would authorize the opening of a bear hound hunting season in Montana. This legislation is entirely unnecessary as Montana already has successful fair chase bear hunting. Enacting hound hunting here would fly in the face of Montana's nearly century-old hunting tradition. According to the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks 2011 bear report: "Since the mid-1990s, Montana's annual black bear harvest has averaged 4th in the nation behind Washington, Oregon, and Idaho in numbers of bears harvested.... Approximately 1,000 black bears are harvested annually in Montana . . . *This is accomplished without the use of baits or hounds.*"¹

Montana prides itself on fair-chase bear hunting and that is acknowledged in the same Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks 2011 report. It reads: "*Montana offers world renowned, fair-chase black bear hunting, and black bears are a highly treasured big game animal in Montana....Use of dogs to hunt black bears or grizzly bears was prohibited in Montana in 1921....The harvesting of cubs or females with cubs, was prohibited in 1947, followed by a prohibition of the use of baits in 1948. With these regulations in place, black bear hunting became more of a fair chase sport in Montana.*"²

Responsible hunters adhere to the principle of fair-chase—they want a reasonable chance for the animal to get away. There is nothing fair about a pack of trained hounds wearing high-tech collars running down a bear or shooting the exhausted animal off a tree limb.

Given Montana's grizzly bear population, allowing bear hounding here would be especially concerning. While many states that don't have grizzly populations have chosen to ban hounding also, the prohibition on bear hounding in a state with a grizzly population is particularly important. In fact, the president of a California hound hunting organization recently wrote in a floor alert to the California legislature, "One of the main reasons states like Montana and Wyoming don't allow the use of dogs is because of their grizzly bear population, as they don't tree. [These states are] concerned with the protection of the dogs confronting a grizzly bear."³

Finally... expanding hound hunting opportunities in Montana decreases the right of a private property owner or land trust to maintain their property as a no bear hunting area as dogs in the chase cannot honor property boundaries. This creates a scenario for criminal trespass and confrontations between neighbors, trappers, hunters and other outdoor recreationalists.

Only eighteen states allow the hunting of bears with hounds, and fourteen states, including major hunting states like Colorado, Oregon, Washington, and Pennsylvania, conduct successful hunting seasons without resorting to this unfair and inhumane practice. Montana has banned hounding for nearly a century, and there is no need to allow the practice again.

I respectfully urge the committee to reject House Bill 114. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ Mace, Richard D. and Tonya Chilton-Radant. "Black Bear Harvest Research and Management in Montana 2011 Final Report." Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. 2011. p. vii, p. 5.

² Ibid, p.1, p. 45.

³ Josh Brones, floor report distributed to California legislature, 2012.